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Arab League brands Hezbollah a terrorist organisation

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The Arab League decision is the latest broadside in Saudi Arabia's campaign against Hezbollah

The Arab League has declared the Lebanese Shia Muslim movement Hezbollah a terrorist organisation - a week after a similar move by Arab Gulf states.

The Arab League, dominated by Sunni Muslim countries, said the decision had

been near unanimous.

Hezbollah is a key political and military force in Lebanon, and is involved in the conflict in Syria.

Its support for President Bashar al-Assad has long pitted it against Gulf states backing rebels.

Correspondents say the move by the Arab League, in the wake of the decision by the Saudi-led Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), will intensify pressure on

Hezbollah.

The move aligns the 22-member organisation firmly behind Saudi Arabia and the bloc of six GCC states.

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Tensions between Saudi Arabia in particular and Hezbollah have intensified recently as the Saudis have clashed more openly with Hezbollah's main backer, Iran.

'Reservations'

The decision on Hezbollah came at a meeting of foreign ministers of the 22 Arab League members in Cairo.

Lebanon and Iraq had not supported the decision, having expressed "reservations", a statement said.



| Hezbollah (pictured) and the Saudis have backed opposing sides in Syria for years

BBC regional analyst Sebastian Usher says this is the latest broadside in Saudi Arabia's campaign against Hezbollah, which is backed by its main regional rival, Iran.

Where once such battles were rhetorical or covert, the Saudis have recently adopted a far more openly aggressive stance against its enemies, he says.

For years, Hezbollah and the Saudis have supported opposing sides in Syria - the Shia movement on the battlefield, Riyadh by proxy.

But they now confront each other to some extent in Yemen, too, and in Gulf states that claim to have broken up Hezbollah plots.

Lebanon may be collateral damage in this confrontation, our analyst adds, with the Saudis withdrawing billions of dollars in promised military aid and telling their citizens to leave.

The Arab League and GCC decision to classify Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation bring them into line with the United States and the European Union - although the latter has only blacklisted the group's military wing.

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